

# The Jewish Attitude Toward Christ

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## Introduction

The present reasonable and respectful attitude on the part of many enlightened modern Jews toward the name of Jesus fills with hope those who have found in Jesus the Messiah of Israel, even though this change of attitude falls short of the confession of his twofold glory as "the Christ, the Son of the living God." It is a glimmer which, we trust, will grow into clearer light, and is a great advance upon the stupid prejudice frequently met with in former days.

There is no doubt that rabbinical and Talmudical Judaism is not a true development of the faith of ancient Israel as reflected in its psalms and in the writings of the prophets. The Old Testament called for a man, the Man whose face shines from every page of the New; modern Judaism is a mere makeshift for that Man. We who have been under its yoke know what a sorry substitute it is, how unsatisfying to the heart, how unavailing for the conscience, how unfruitful for the life! But we rejoice that an increasing number of our Jewish brethren are prepared to investigate afresh—and that without traditional prejudice—the claims of Jesus of Nazareth to be the Messiah of Israel.

MAX I. REICH.



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## The Jewish Attitude Toward Christ

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Ever since the day when Jesus of Nazareth stood in judgment before Pontius Pilate and the multitude of our Jewish brethren at the instigation of false leaders cried, "Away with him," our attitude toward Christ has been one of hostility. Jesus, "the greatest blessing for the entire world," Jesus, "the light of the world," Jesus, "the breathing of whose very name casts a spell of holiness over the human heart," this Jesus has been and still is looked upon by the great mass of unenlightened Jews as a false prophet, a traitor, a blasphemer, and a destroyer, the enemy of Israel and of Jehovah. His very name is shunned by his brethren according to the flesh; its very mention is a sin. When Christ's name has to be mentioned a nickname is substituted. "That man," "the hanged one," "the one whose name is blotted out," are some of the substitutional names for him who is "the glory of Israel." From childhood abhorrence of Christ and his teachings has been instilled. As one looks back to those days it all seems a horrible night-

mare. Yet there are many thousands of our brethren who still see in Jesus their greatest enemy, whose hearts are full of contempt of all that is connected with him and his teachings.

All through the dark ages of Jewish history there were some Jews who knew the truth about Jesus. They realized that in him the promises through the prophets found their fulfillment. They knew that he was Israel's only hope. In him they saw Israel's promised Messiah, the glory of Israel and the light of the Gentiles. They knew that with him was bound up the future of our people for in him there is life, hope, and salvation. These Jews, few in number though they were, kept not silence. They proclaimed to their brethren that in Jesus they had found him of whom Moses and the prophets spoke. They tried to convince the great mass of our brethren that Jesus was not that which we were taught of him. Unfortunately their voice was but a voice in the wilderness. Individuals listened to the message and accepted it, but the great majority refused to hear anything of the Nazarene. The lot of those who confessed Jesus as Christ was very hard; like their Master, they were despised, rejected, hated, and persecuted. The follower of Christ was stamped

as an apostate, and to inflict pain on such was considered, and unfortunately is still considered by many, as the performance of some worthy and religious act.

With the dawning of the new age a change has come over our people. We live no longer behind the walls of the ghetto. We have outgrown the "four yards of Halacha." We have caught sight of the outside world. We Jews have come into contact with the great Gentile world, and find that wisdom will not die with us. We find that in this, to us, new world, there are other men who think, feel, and understand, men with ideals and noble aspirations. To our great surprise we also find that the same Jesus whom we despised and rejected occupies the central place in this great world. This Jesus of whom we thought so little is influencing the whole human race. The noblest and best sons of humanity are paying homage to the Nazarene and ascribing their highest aspirations to him. We find that in this new world we have to come into close contact with Christ, his influence and teaching.

While he has not as yet a clear view of Christ, the enlightened Jew realizes that the old view is obsolete. To speak of him in the terms of the old ghetto days would be nothing less than play-

ing the idiot. Facts and life are too outspoken in their valuation of Jesus and his teachings. Thus an interest in the life and teaching of Jesus of Nazareth has arisen. Jews have begun to study the New Testament, some out of curiosity, others in order to be able to defend Judaism, still others in order to be able to assail Christianity, but a goodly number are in real earnest, seeking to find the truth. During the last century and in this, a host of sons and daughters of Israel have found in Jesus their Messiah and have glorified him by their lives and testimony. Enlightened Jews from every part of the globe, without as yet accepting his Messianic claims, bear testimony that Jesus is the greatest of the children of men, the noblest teacher and benefactor of humanity. His life, they say, was holy, pure, unselfish, and godly. His teaching, they tell us, is Jewish and in conformity with the teaching of Moses and the prophets.

How sweet to the ear used to the curses and defamations of Talmudic Judaism are the new voices in modern Jewry! Listen carefully to them as they speak in the following pages. They are the voices of representative Jews, historians, philosophers, scholars, theologians, and leaders of popular movements in Jewry, who are known, and favorably known, in Europe and America.



SEMEN M. DUBNOV—Out of the bosom of Judaism went forth the religion that in a short time ran its triumphant course through the whole ancient world, transforming races of barbarians into civilized beings. It was the fulfillment of the prophetic promise that the nations would walk in the light of Israel. ("Jewish History," Ch. II.)

BARUCH SPINOZA—Christ was not so much a prophet as the mouthpiece of God. Christ was sent to teach, not only the Jews, but the whole human race; and therefore it was not enough that his mind should be adapted to the opinions of the Jews alone, but also to the opinions and fundamental teachings common to the whole human race—in other words, to ideas universal and true. ("Tractatus Theologico-Politicus," Ch. IV.)

ISRAEL ZANGWILL—Not a daybreak but a burst of sunshine. (In answer to Dr. I. K. Funk's question: "Do you agree with Dr. Kohler that there was a spiritual daybreak on the shores of Galilee nineteen centuries ago, which was not sufficiently recognized by the official sanhedrin of that time?")

MAX NORDAU—If the Jews, up to the present, have not publicly rendered homage to the sublime moral beauty of the figure of Jesus, it is because their tormentors have already persecuted, tortured, assassinated them in his name. The Jews have drawn their conclusions from the disciples as to the Master. It was wrong, but pardonable in the eternal victims of the implacably cruel hatred of those who called themselves Christians. (In a reply, a Hebrew Christian, who asked whether the Jews as a people ought not to reconsider the judgment of condemnation passed by their forefathers on Jesus.) (Jewish Chronicle, December 15, 1899.)

CLAUDE G. MONTEFIORE—There is in it [the New Testament] much that is great and noble, much that is sublime and tender, much that is good and true. The greater part consists in a fresh presentment of some of the best and highest teachings in the Old Testament, in a vivid reformulation of it. But a part consists in fuller development or in a clearer and more emphatic expression of certain truths, which previously were only implicit, or not fully drawn out. (*Jewish Chronicle*, December 14, 1899.)

ISIDORE SINGER—I regard Jesus of Nazareth as a Jew of the Jews, one whom all Jewish people are learning to love. His teaching has been an immense service to the world in bringing Israel's God to the knowledge of hundreds of millions of mankind. (In a letter to Dr. I. K. Funk, March 25, 1901.)

ABRAHAM KROCHMAL—Has he [Jesus] not brought millions under the wing of the divine majesty and taught men discipline, morality, righteousness, and faith through the power of the Holy Spirit? (Translated from the Hebrew and quoted by Rev. A. R. Kuldell in "*Jewish View of Jesus Reviewed*.")

JOSEPH REINACH—The characteristic mark of Jesus' moral is love, the purest and noblest love that ever existed—love for all human creatures, love for the poor, love for the wicked. Love is joy, and love is duty, and love is life. Humanity, since its first day and to its last day, was and will be thirsty for love, and Jesus is and will remain one of the highest types of humanity, because his words and his legends and his poetry are and will be an eternal source of love. (From a letter to I. K. Funk, November 28, 1899.)

CESAR LOMBROSO—In my eyes Jesus is one of

the greatest geniuses the world has produced.  
(From a letter to Dr. I. K. Funk, September 29,  
1899.)

MORITZ LAZARUS—I am of the opinion that we  
should endeavor with all possible zeal to obtain  
an exact understanding of the great personality  
of Jesus and to reclaim him for Judaism.  
(From a letter to Dr. I. K. Funk, January 24,  
1901.)

MORRIS JASTROW—From the historic point of  
view, Jesus is to be regarded as a direct successor  
of the Hebrew prophets. His teachings are syn-  
onymous with the highest spiritual aspirations of  
the human race. . . . The long hoped-for re-  
conciliation between Judaism and Christianity  
will come when once the teachings of Jesus shall  
have become the axioms of human conduct.  
(From a letter to Dr. I. K. Funk, November 6,  
1899.)

DAVID CASTELLI—Jesus in a certain sense ful-  
filled in his person the prophecies of the Old  
Testament; they reached in him a height beyond  
which it is impossible to go. He was not the  
magnificent worldly king, since there could be no  
question of a worldly king in Israel again, for  
whom the Hebrews waited in vain; but he was  
the great teacher of mankind, spreading among  
all nations that principle of love and humanity  
which, until then, had remained confined within  
the limits of Judaism. His word, and after him  
that of the apostles who, like himself, were born  
and reared in Judaism, were a powerful means  
of carrying into effect the yet unfulfilled prophecy  
of the Old Testament: "Jehovah shall be king  
over all the earth: in that day shall Jehovah be  
one, and his name one." (From a letter to  
Dr. I. K. Funk, September 28th, 1899.)

J. II. HOFFMAN—I revere him [Jesus] for having brought home, by his own life and his teachings, to the innermost hearts and souls of mankind, of all times in every station, the eternal truths as first embodied in the Mosaic code and proclaimed in undying words by the prophets. I recognize in him the blending of the divine and human, the lofty and the lowly, showing the path for the dual nature of man by divine aspiration to gain the victory over the earthly life tending to draw him downward—the Son of God triumphing over the child of earth. (From a letter to Dr. I. K. Funk, October 6, 1899.)

JOSEPH KRAUSKOPF—But the simple truths which he [Jesus] taught have ever constituted his greatest glory, have carried his name to the ends of the earth, and from proudest palace to humblest hut, these have ever come as a healing balm to hearts heavy-laden, and to minds sorrowing and despairing, these have for nearly nineteen hundred years formed the rule of right and the law of duty, the guide to virtue for countless millions of people. (Lecture: “Jesus a Jew, not a Christian.”)

KAUFMANN KOHLER—A great personality, standing unlike any other midway between heaven and earth, equally near to God and to man, Jesus, the helper of the poor, the friend of the sinner, the brother of every fellow sufferer, the comforter of every sorrow-laden one, the healer of the sick, the uplifter of the fallen, the lover of man, and the redeemer of woman, won the heart of mankind by storm . . . mounted the world's throne to be the earth's great king. (Quoted by W. Gidney, “A Handbook of Reasons, Facts, and Figures.”)

STEPHEN S. WISE—Even if Jesus had not been

born unto Israel, even if he had borne no relation to the people of Israel, it becomes of importance of Israel to determine for itself what shall be its relation to the man who has touched the world nearly two thousand years as has no other single figure in history. . . . It is no mean joy and ignoble pride in us of the house of Israel to recognize, to honor, and to cherish among our brothers, Jesus the Jew. (In *The Outlook*, June 7, 1913.)

GUSTAVE GOTTHEIL—The keynote of prophetic religion of the Jewish prophets was holiness of life and purity of heart. Love and mercy shown by men, one to another, make up the acceptable worship of the Holy One of Israel. To place the Master of Nazareth by their side can surely be no dishonor to him, nor can it dim the luster of his name. If he has added to their spiritual bequests new jewels of religious truth, and spoken words which are words of life, because they touch the deepest springs of the human heart, why should we Jews not glory in him? (From a letter to Dr. I. K. Funk, October 24, 1899.)

The Jewish leaders here quoted—and there are many who have expressed similar views—by confessing Jesus to have become the means of making known the God of Abraham to millions of men, by confessing that his teaching follows out that of Moses and the prophets, by confessing that his life was pure, holy, and godly, admit that our forefathers passed unjust and false judgment on the Nazarene. Consequently those that branded, and still brand, Jesus as traitor,

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blasphemer, and impostor, are wrong, promoters of lies and seducers of the people. Those that branded Jesus as an enemy of Israel and Jehovah were either fools, knaves, or ignorant men; for the most superficial perusal of his teachings, and they are accessible to all, will convince anyone who wishes to be convinced that Jesus' heart overflowed with love and compassion for Israel and love and holy zeal for his Father. That our leaders misled us is, therefore, the verdict of the great men in modern Israel.

While we rejoice to see the change of attitude on the part of our enlightened Jewish brethren toward Christ, while we are happy to hear the new voices that announce to us the break of the morning for our beloved nation we cannot and must not be satisfied. We cannot and must not keep silence. We must continue to raise our voices and proclaim to you, our enlightened Jewish brethren, yes, to you great leaders of modern Jewry, that you, just as our forefathers, are still in error, that your conception of Christ is likewise false. He is not standing before you in judgment. Christ is not depending upon your approval or disapproval. He is either a sanctuary or a stone of stumbling and a rock of offense. Only when you acknowledge him as the King and Messiah, and do homage to him as



such, will you have reached the truth; and the truth alone will make you free. To our brethren who still hold the old views of Christ we wish to say: Let not the bitter memories of countless persecutions committed against our people by those who called themselves Christians prejudice your minds and blind your eyes to the beauty of holiness in Jesus. Lift up your eyes and see what God has wrought through him. See the blessings he brought to those who were afar off and remember that he is our rightful King. We are wanderers, we are exiles, but so was he. Exiled by his own to whom he came, despised and rejected by those he loved dearly, wounded in the house of his friends, he still loves you and calls to the weary and heavy-laden: "Come unto me, . . . and I will give you rest,"

